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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: LABOR CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS ROLE OF UNIONS IN
FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David Lindwall for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (U) Summary: A three-day international labor conference in Guatemala City focused on the role of labor organizations in the fight against impunity. Unionists, civil society leaders, government officials, and representatives of the private sector and the international community highlighted the problem of impunity in advancing respect for labor rights. They also discussed violence against women and the rights of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups. The Ambassador attended the opening. President Colom expressed his commitment to fight for social justice and human rights, and to engage in inclusive social dialogue. Minister of Labor Rodriguez pledged to eradicate child labor and continue to advocate for legislation to combat violence against women. End Summary.

12. (U) During a three-day (January 29-31) international conference hosted by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in Guatemala City, civil society leaders, government officials, and representatives of the private sector, regional and international labor movements, and international community discussed the role of labor organizations in the fight against impunity. The conference highlighted Guatemala as a dangerous country for labor unionists. It focused on labor rights violations, labor union rights and strengthening of the labor movement, the rights of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups, and the link among international trade, investment, development aid, and core labor standards.

13. (U) President Colom inaugurated the conference by expressing his commitment to fight for social justice and human rights. He affirmed that his government does not have hidden "parallel power structures," and that it will not persecute labor union leaders. He pledged to strengthen the Labor Inspectorate and to engage in social dialogue with all segments of society. He stressed the importance of cleaning house and imposing order and discipline in the Executive to fight impunity, and of respecting and promoting the rule of law.

14. (C) In a private meeting with an international labor delegation (septel) prior to the opening of the conference, President Colom committed to visiting Puerto Quetzal and meeting with the dock workers union (STEPQ). Colom acknowledged the union as an important social partner and conveyed his view of social inclusiveness as the way forward. He expressed concern over the Public Ministry's refusal to meet with the delegation to discuss developments in the investigation of the January 2007 murder of STEPQ Secretary General Pedro Zamora, and promised to obtain information on

the status of the case.

¶5. (U) International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) Commissioner Castresana explained CICIG's role and structure, noting that violence against trade unionists has been increasing since the signing of the Peace Accords. He pledged to assist Guatemalan institutions in investigating and prosecuting organized crime, and committed to investigating specific murders of trade unionists upon receipt of written request from the unions. He commended organized labor for hosting the timely conference and encouraged it to continue to play a leading role.

¶6. (U) In his closing remarks, newly appointed Minister of Labor Eduardo Rodriguez reiterated the need to fight crime and corruption to advance respect for labor rights. He pledged to continue to advocate for legislation to address violence against women, an issue of top priority during his tenure as President of the Congressional Human Rights Committee. Highlighting the "solidarity" slogan of the Colom administration, Rodriguez called on union organizers to unite. He expressed his determination to eradicate child labor, and the hope that the business sector will view unions not as its enemy but as the "right arm of production."

¶7. (U) In its concluding declaration, the conference called for prompt investigation of the murders of Guatemalan labor leaders Pedro Zamora, Marco Tulio Ramirez, Raul Castro Bocel, and Rosalio Rene Gonzalez Villatoro. It welcomed President Colom's commitment to strengthen the Labor Inspectorate. It called on the international community to intensify political and material support for CICIG. It highlighted as a priority combating violence against women. It also stressed the need for an international campaign on the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

¶8. (C) Comment: President Colom's participation in this conference heightened the visibility of the labor movement. His commitment to strengthen the Labor Inspectorate and to lay the foundations for an inclusive social dialogue gives a boost to the Guatemalan labor movement. The extent to which Colom will be able to fulfill his commitments will depend in large part on his winning the acquiescence of the business community and other important political actors.
Lindwall